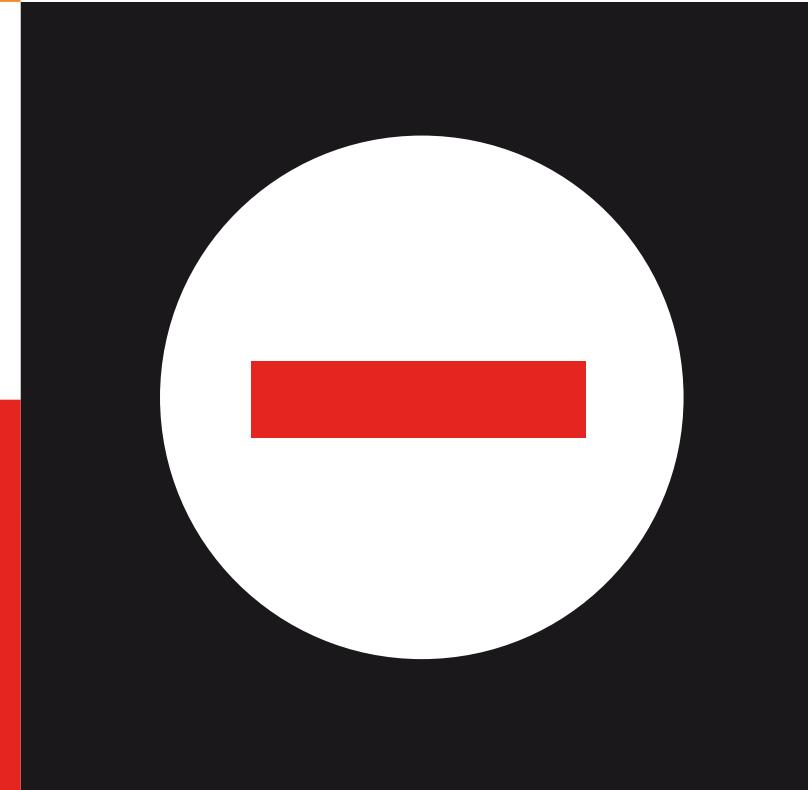
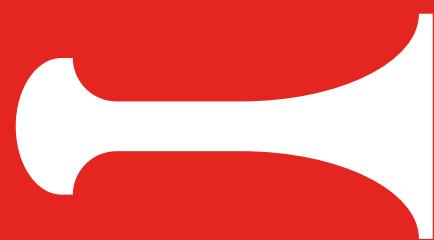
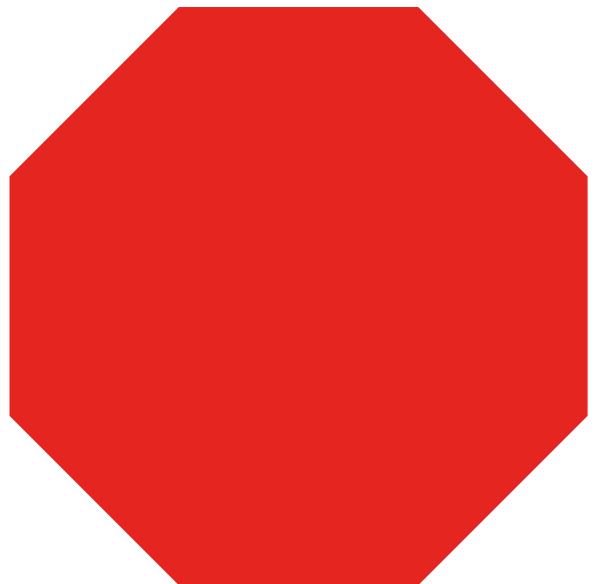


# KLAXON 2

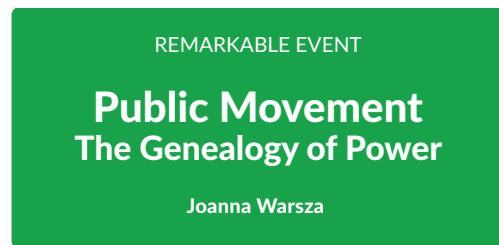
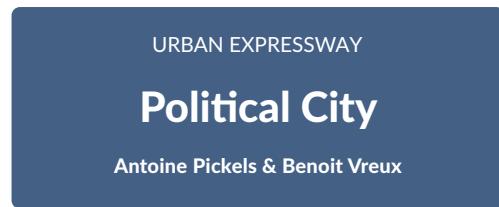


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**KLAXON 2**

**Political City**

**(when art lives in town)**



URBAN EXPRESSWAY

## Political City

Antoine Pickels and Benoit Vreux

This second issue of *Klaxon* has as its source, like the launching edition, the 2013 Summer University at Cifas, which probed that distinct zone where art in public spaces jostles with political activism, often staying in the background to the benefit of the latter. Not dating from yesterday, this dynamic wave has involved artists turning their backs on the sheltered havens of cultural institutions and taking to city streets and squares, and activists adopting the artistic discourse of more unorthodox strategies than those deployed in traditional forms of protest. Without necessarily going back to the Paris Commune of 1871, as John Jordan does in this edition's opening article, we witnessed similar approaches and strategies deployed – the feminism of the 1980s, or those various associations who took up the challenge to combat the Aids crisis in 1980-90 come to mind – that enabled relatively small-scale groups to create images (and sense) in public space. More recently, movements such as Greenpeace or the Alter-globalisation groups have employed similar instruments in their quests... We are witnessing the crossing over of this vocabulary into the discourse of present-day protest movements and with the development of the Internet and social networks we have seen a tenfold increase in the impact of these images produced by protest group engaged in the medium term, (Femen, Pussy Riot...) or by such short-lived groups (the naked cyclists en masse in the World Naked Bike Ride, the *Intermittents* [French entertainment workers] or those socially vulnerable in Latin America). We've already seen this play out in places as varied as Wall St, (Occupy) or Tahrir Square (where numerous artists contributed to events during the occupation in an original way) or at Taksim Square (the "standing men")... Reactionary movements, even extreme right parties, have laid claim to the syntax

(when it comes to caricature, the pitiful French “Homen” offer a classic example).

And where are we today? If publications such as *Klaxon*, focused on the practice of living arts in public space, cannot boast to possess a comprehensive vision of such a vast question, it can at the very least gauge the temperature — viewed through the prism of five of today’s practices that engage with political consciousness in public space.

The “artivists” we present to you in this edition span a wide and diverse spectrum, combining permanent engagement or increasingly event-driven; working with derision and the misappropriation of symbols, or, of the opposite, with the creation of an alternative life-style; positioning their actions in reference to the social collective or using the human body's intimate sphere as an anchoring post for politically-oriented questions. That which interlinks these diverse happenings and practices, aside from their formal aspects, is that they all avoid the vintage dichotomy: art or politics; form or substance; image or discourse.

John Jordan, a veteran urban activist chose, for instance, to leave city-life behind, reckoning the only way to combat the capitalist logic was to head towards its perimeters, its margins. In a deeply cogent article, he explains his stance, and in the process touches upon the myth of Gilgamesh, the invention of agriculture, the Paris Commune, the “artivism” craze and Darwin’s theories to culminate with his conclusion for the need for radical change.

Voina, the Russian collective (literally, in Russian: Война = war) who right from the outset shunned the art world also decided to no longer serve as media-fodder — this in no way means that they are no longer active, but rather that they are acting in a truly underground manner. Today Voina feature on Interpol’s wanted list and yet continue to occupy subversive terrain both on the artistic and political levels, with operations they don’t claim responsibility for. As for the Israeli collective Public Movement they continue to operate within the law,

but their happenings, as underlined by the curator Joanna Warsza play precisely with the ambiguity of the presence of law enforcement personnel at their side, with the fascination of the symbols of power, or the spontaneous obedience of the participants to the oppressive symbols, signalling the illusory character of "freedom". This question concerning the limits of freedom is also posed by the impromptu appearances by South African performance artist Steven Cohen when he lays siege to public space without any forewarning. And so it was with his performance of *Coq/Cock* at the base of the Eiffel Tower which ended up with him incurring the wrath (and a conviction) of both the Parisian police and the French judicial system, illustrating, as he views it, the blatant hypocrisy of a government that simultaneously acts as accuser and tolerator. Is the solution to be found in that curious in-between with those refreshing, improbable and disturbing protests by the Brussels based collective MANIFESTEMENT?

If all these movements persist in their current marginal form, they strike us as being pioneers of new spheres of art, capable, as such, of renewing with its force for social intervention by transforming the means with which our imagination engages with today's world. For between derision, nihilism and genuine questions – to which these unforeseen "attacks" call attention to – it would seem that, there also, artistic intervention in an urban setting can no longer merely content itself with being visible and legible, if its purpose, as prescribed by Voina, is not to create politicised art but to "engage in politics in an artistic way".

Translation: John Barrett

Cifas.be

MAIN STREET

## Try to Imagine (Letter to a Corpse)

John Jordan

Listen to John Jordan here : [bit.ly/1kkKWut](http://bit.ly/1kkKWut)

Dear Dad,

You were my age when you discovered the cancer that was to kill you a few years later. It was the late 1970's, an age where many feared the world would be wiped out by nuclear war.

I will never know what you really believed in, but the stories I read in a youthful student diary of yours and some of the books you left, suggests that you had at least flirted with radical ideas. Ideas that maybe didn't really fit with the life you were leading and the work you were doing at NATO.

And it makes me wonder, were you infected with the deep disease that lies at the heart of capitalism, this plague of extreme separation that affects so many of us? Had you separated what you believed in from how you acted in the world, had you allowed there to be chasm between your politics, your aesthetics, your ethics and your everyday life?

This question of rebuilding the relationship between ideas and acts, to merge life and thoughts, to stop putting worlds into boxes and try to live a coherent existence is what has made me radically change my life over the last year. After 25 years of being an art activist in the megapolis, I deserted, I left London, not to escape, but to start a new front, a front that merged resisting this world and creating new ones – that might survive the future.

I begin this letter sitting in my new home, the late summer sun streams into our large yurt. From my desk I see the seven hectares of land in which we produce our food and the food for some of the towns and villages around us. Dad, I wish you could see the choices I made in my life. I wish you could meet some of my friends with whom I live and share my life with. I wish you could listen to your grandson playing his viola in the symphony orchestra or deejaying at his squat parties. But perhaps my greatest regret is that I wish I had asked you as you lay dying of cancer – what you had regretted about your life.

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The metropolis is one of the most efficient systems of separation within the machine of capitalism.

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A recent study entitled *The Five Top Regrets of the Dying* was based on conversations a nurse had had with terminally ill patients. All of them were knowingly living the last days of their life and they spoke to her about their regrets. These regrets speak of the disease of separation: a separation between work and friendship, between the right to life and the right to happiness. A dislocation between our passions and our actions.

The metropolis is one of the most efficient systems of separation within the machine of capitalism, it is founded on perhaps the most violent separation of all – the separation of our biosphere from human life. It is a milieu in which everything is done so that humans only relate to themselves, so that we create ourselves separately from other forms of existence, other forms of life.

In the world's oldest surviving written story, the Mesopotamian epic of Gilgamesh, Enkidu the wild man, is seduced into the city, into being 'civilised', by the whore of Babylon. His seamless life with the natural world, where he eats wild plants and drinks from the rivers, is broken, and he soon dies

regretting that he had been lead astray to become complicit with murder of a fellow and the destruction of the forests.

The epic of Gilgamesh was perhaps the first tale that tells that urban 'civilised life' is the epitome of progress and that the dirty, barbaric, chaotic, natural world's only value is to be controlled, captured for our use. The tablets with the story written on them were found under the great walled city of Uruk built five thousands years ago. Surrounded by cedar forest, it lived off some of the first farmed and irrigated fields in the history of humanity. Like most civilisations it did not last much more than a couple of thousand years. If you go there now there are just dusty ruins surrounded by desert.

Even before the Sumerian civilisation collapsed, the epic of Gilgamesh asked what price people pay to be civilized. It's a question many of us should perhaps be asking ourselves as we face the final confrontation between capitalism's need for infinite growth and the finite resources of a single planet.

The extraordinary thing is that no city is much more than five thousands years old. That's about seventy life times away, seventy generations, a blip in history, just 0.002 per cent of the two and a half million years since our first ancestors began to sharpen stones.

What is just as extraordinary is that our minds and bodies are no different from these ancestors of ours. If we could build a time machine and transport a child from the mouth of a cave in the upper Palaeolithic to a Brussels apartment in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century and raise them as our own, they would have just the same chance as a contemporary child at getting a degree in quantum physics or becoming a famous computer programmer.

The only evolution has been cultural, not physical. We have the same intelligence and sensibilities. We are gatherer hunter bodies living in a very recently artificialized domesticated world, no wonder it seems so strange and wrong sometimes.

All the archaeological and anthropological evidence, much from the study of contemporary gatherer hunters, backs up the ancient myths of the fall from paradise and the golden age. For the last 99.998% of human history we gathered our food from the wild – nuts, berries, fruit – the occasional hunting and scavenging of game. We worked less than three hours a day and the rest of the time was spent telling stories, singing, making love, sleeping, dreaming.

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Perhaps the law of the jungle was not competition and coercion, the survival of the fittest – but quite the opposite.

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Try to imagine. That is how humans were for most of history.

Perhaps the law of the jungle was not competition and coercion, the survival of the fittest – but quite the opposite: a spirit of generosity, of sharing and of anti-authoritarianism. Everything belonged to everybody, we were deeply connected to each other and the worlds we passed through, there was no hierarchy. But that story doesn't quite fit the myths of capitalism.

Around ten thousands years ago a radical revolution occurred, things began to change faster than anything had ever before. Some people started playing around with seeds and plants, and we began to farm and settle.

Farming achieved quantity at the expense of quality: more people and more food, but not necessarily better food or better lives. From eating thousands of different species of plants we were reduced to a handful of starchy roots and grasses – and we had to work hard, very hard, digging, sowing, planting.

The Neolithic revolution was perhaps the most radical revolution in history, no other invention has had such huge consequences. The deal of the Neolithic was that we swapped a life of interdependence with the natural world to one of dependence

to a few domesticated species. By domesticating our food we domesticated ourselves. Without our care the plants died and without them we starve.

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The division between the urban and the rural no longer really exists.

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Now at the start of this, perhaps humanities final century, the metropolis is everywhere. The city as a politically autonomous zone, federated with other diverse cities, an old European tradition, has been destroyed everywhere by the centralised state and its metropolitan mind set. The division between the urban and the rural no longer really exists. The culture of the metropolis has subsumed all territories, everywhere is the same, same clothes, same music, same shops, local difference has been eroded.

We are living the final consequences of the disequilibrium between our biosphere and our culture – our society is at war with the natural world and the metropolis is the command centre, a command centre than runs through every one of us. Any study of the ruins of past civilisations reveals that nature normally wins the war and that the poor suffer most.

One hundred million people died in the wars of the last century, another hundred million are expected to die due to climate change over the next eighteen years, nearly all of them people with life styles that produce very little CO<sub>2</sub>. The climate catastrophe is not only a war on the biosphere, it is war on the poor.

Dad, unlike your generation, mine never experienced cities in ruins, and I have little memory of living under the shadow of nuclear war, but the shadow that the future throws on my generation is equally terrifying once one understands the full significance of runaway climate change, and the exhaustion of virtually all our natural resources under the pressure

of consumer capitalism. It's already happening as our eco systems fracture. We are in the midst of the 6<sup>th</sup> greatest extinction, the first in thirty million years, it is the consequence of a war of "development" whose weapons have increased exponentially since your cold war began half a century ago.

This time the inevitable collapse of civilisation will not be local but global, the only question left is how do we navigate the future to make sure that this crisis brings out the best in humanity rather than the worse.

To get through it we are going to require a cultural transformation as radical and deep seated as the Neolithic revolution. We are going to have to imagine a paradigm shift in the way we are human, in how we sense the world, in how we live and make culture, in what it means to live with all other forms of life that we share our world with.

Try to imagine.

Artists are good at imagining that which seems impossible, in proposing futures that do not fit within the paradigms of the present, in daring to set sail for utopias even when the maps have not yet been drawn.

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Too many so-called "creative" are masking the horrors of capitalism with their progressive art and culture.

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But artists are also easily seduced by fame and fortune. Too many so-called "creative" are masking the horrors of capitalism with their progressive art and culture, remaining dependent on the very machines that they are denouncing, reproducing the system using their creativity which in the end makes it appear cleaner, more progressive, more desirable.

It's very fashionable to be doing politics in the art world of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. But despite the number of Biennales and exhibitions plastering the words *activism*, *social change*, *resistance* and the *political* all over their catalogues, the majority of the work is simply representation of activism, pictures of politics, fictional insurrections, micro gestures with little strategy for how they might evolve into any meaningful social transformation. There is little effort to use creativity to build new social movements yet a lot of work capturing the energy of movements into the realm of art, as if it were a zoo for exotic species the "real activists".

Part of the paradigm shift will be to radically transform the role of art, to give up representation and turn to transformation, apply our creativity in the service of life, and this, Dad, is where the book on the Paris Commune you left me comes in.

From the 18<sup>th</sup> of March to the 28<sup>th</sup> of May, 1871, the Commune radically transformed the city of Paris. What began as a kind of 19<sup>th</sup> century Woodstock, a resistant festival where bodies reinvented themselves and new forms of life were acted out, ended with the stench of rotting corpses filling the streets of Paris.

If the Commune was one of the first insurrections of the modern era, what were the artists doing? Most of the Impressionists — the painters of modern life — escaped Paris, they took refuge in seaside cottages and rural retreats, many continued painting — portraits, seascapes, silent couples sitting at tables, bunches of flowers...

One artist famously did the opposite; he remained in the insurrectionary city, and put down his paintbrushes. ART WAS NOT ENOUGH.

Convinced that the Commune was a prefigurative embodiment of the ideas of his friend and founder of modern anarchist theory Proudhon, Courbet immersed himself in organising. His art became the creation and performance of new forms of life.

A few weeks later as Marx described, “to broadly mark the new era of history it was conscious of initiating... the Commune pulled down that colossal system of martial glory, the Vendôme column.” This monument to hierarchy and war was incompatible with the solidarity and horizontality of the Commune.

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The destruction of the Vendôme column was perhaps the first act of modern art activism.

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Despite initial reservations, Courbet eventually signed the decree for the column's destruction and helped plan the rebellious festival that brought this hated symbol crashing down. The destruction of the Vendôme column was a piece of total theatre; invitations were printed, bands played and twenty thousand people watched as the winches pulled and the column fell engulfing the square in a huge cloud of dust. It was the closing act of the brief utopian experiment and perhaps the first act of modern art activism.

Six days later the Republican troupes broke through the barricades and began their massacre. Seventy-two days of experimenting with new forms of life ended in a week of ruthless killing. Tens of thousands of communards were rounded up, summarily executed or arrested. Marshall law was declared and the impressionists began to return to town.

Two years later the impressionists first exhibition opens, it revolutionises painting, but in fact their shock aesthetics are just masking the horror. It was what today we might call “art washing”. The free and liberated crowd of the Commune was erased with portraits of isolated individuals. Streets stained with death were washed away with still lives bursting with colour. Modern life returned, and with it the myth of the artists as disengaged, “neutral” aesthetic rebel.

The new forms of social life that arose during the Commune, such as the heated direct democratic debates in the new grassroots clubs, the requisitioned empty buildings transformed into public housing, the expropriated workshops turned into worker owned cooperatives, the demand for female suffrage; everything withered away like plants brought indoors. From now on progress would be to aspire to an ordered comfortable Bourgeois life.

Impressionism had restored the “normality” of modern life. Fearful of taking sides and of getting too close to that which they could not control, the Impressionists had put art in the service of business as usual, in their fear they had domesticated and erased the experiment in new forms of life.

These different roles of the artists during the Commune are a lesson for all of us in this similar moment of crisis and transition. With every act of obedience we remake the world as it is and undo the world as it could be. With every nod to authority we let go a bit more of who we are.

I was never sure of who you were dad, and although your books might remain, your corpse is sure to have become the food of worms. Ten years after the Commune Charles Darwin wrote that “worms have played a more important part in the history of the world than most persons would at first assume”.

Without them there would be nowhere for seeds to grow, there would be no plants, no forests, no food. And without food there would be no human history – no ritual, no art, no cities, no culture.

Darwin called worms “small agencies” whose “accumulated effects” turns out to be huge. Like artists and activists, with their small intelligent improvisation and their political acupuncture points they are perhaps a healthy reminder that the small can transform history when it embeds itself deeply in the materiality of the world.

The Commune offered the artists a choice, to stay in the city and apply creativity to rebellion and the construction of new forms of life beyond the state or to escape the city to continue to make art whose surface was radical, but which in fact returned everything back to normal and threw a life line to the sinking machine.

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I think it is time for the “creative” to leave the metropolis, to starve capital and capitals of creativity and to create new forms of life on the edges, in the cracks.

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We have a stark choice, either we feed this system; encouraging its behaviour, collaborating with its institutions, promoting its values and masking its horrors – or we do the opposite: starve it of its life blood, rob it of its glamour, weaken its status, break our dependence on it and create spaces of true collective autonomy that will take us into the future.

Outside the centres of the metropolis there is the capacity to find space and time to free our minds and bodies from the constant bombardment of capitalist forces that mould our sensibilities and refashion our needs. I no longer believe this is possible in the artificial hyper controlled space of the modern metropolis.

The atmosphere of freedom and creativity that was in the past attributed to cities needs to be brought back to the countryside, to the small villages and towns that could be part of a process of secession, part of a return to the dream of the Paris Commune, a federation of Communes of Communes, autonomous from the state and capital.

When our energy and fuel systems inevitably break down millions will be forced to leave the cities, in search of food and fuel. The key question will be how do the communities

in the countryside cope with the influx, how do we create spaces for the fugitives that nourish and share in a time of crisis rather than control and privatise.

Try to imagine.

Nine years after you died dad, the entire system that you were fighting against collapsed due to popular uprisings and economic crisis. The mega machine of the soviet empire, which seemed totally invisible, melted away within months. Most of the science says that we have ten years to radically reduce our carbon emissions if we want to stop runaway climate change. What the next ten years will look like I have no idea. All I know is that I don't want to look back and regret that I did not try to do more than simply imagine another future.



*Think Like A Forest*

An art activism and permaculture training by the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, held at La r.O.n.c.e

Brittany, autumn 2011

© Labofii



*Can Mas deu*

Squatted community and agro ecological project, Barcelona.  
Film Still from "Les Sentiers de L'Utopie"  
Book/film by Isabelle Fremeaux and John Jordan, La découverte, 2009

© Isabelle Fremeaux et John Jordan



*The People vs the Banksters*

Snowball fight in London's financial district,  
Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination  
London, winter 2009

© Kristian Buss



CIRCA

Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, G8 protests Gleaveagles  
Scotland, 2005

© John Jordan

## BIOGRAPHY

## John Jordan



John Jordan tries to balance on the edge between art and activism, Co-founder of Reclaim the Streets and the Clown Army (now AWOL), he is also Co-editor of *We Are Everywhere: the irresistible rise of global anti-capitalism* (Verso). In 2004 he began the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination [bit.ly/1lblMJc](http://bit.ly/1lblMJc) infamous for fermenting mass disobedience on bicycles during the Copenhagen climate Summit, throwing snowballs at bankers, launching a rebel raft regatta to shut down a power station. Following the publishing of a film/book *Paths Through Utopias* (Editions Zones, 2012) about European communes (Only in French/German/Korean – although the film part is in english here [bit.ly/1lblHFO](http://bit.ly/1lblHFO)). The Labofii has now moved to France to expand its experiments on a radical farm.

Photo : © Immo Klink.

REMARKABLE EVENT

## Public Movement

### The Genealogy of Power

Joanna Warsza

If we observe somebody who at some stage of their life has practiced ballet, we can instantly recognise that his or her body is encoded with a choreographic sense of gestuality. With the tell-tale straight back, feet positioning and nimble footwork, it somehow remains irremovable like the hint of one's native accent when speaking a foreign language.

Public Movement, an Israeli group of performers and choreographers based in Tel Aviv, focus precisely on such learned behaviours, both on an individual and societal level. These artists are not inspired by art or dance, but rather by the daily life of communities, in their ceremonies or public rituals, imitating specific moments in the lives of individuals, societies, institutions or countries.

The group creates and re-creates social situations: happenings, acts of fictional violence, new folk dances and even simulated car crashes. One of the constitutive elements of their work seems to be a certain observance of the military discipline acquired in the Israeli army and its influence on daily life there—one that leads to a search for codes of social behaviour, collectively or individually. Public Movement play around with synchronized operations, veneration of imaginary symbols, military exercises, the changing of the guard, the arrival of first-aid at the scene of an accident, spontaneous uprisings and other patterns of collective action.

In the autumn of 2008, I proposed to Public Movement that they work on a project based upon the so-called genealogical trips undertaken by Israelis to Poland, in the neighbourhood of the former Warsaw Ghetto. As a resident of Mirów, the

locality in which the former small Ghetto once stood, I was often surprised by the invisibility of young Israelis on the streets. And yet tens of thousands of Israeli high school students each year pass through this neighbourhood that served as a backdrop to the Holocaust.

Following the anniversary of March 68, the “Polish season” in Israel, and simply with the passing of time and the end of the trauma, several exceptionally challenging projects have been launched around the notion of settling scores, an analysis of the past, and issues related to Polish-Jewish and Polish-Israeli tensions. Hence, we could witness Yael Bartana appeal to Israeli Jews to return to cure modern-day Poland, too white and too homogeneous. The installation “(...)” by Anna Baumgart and Agnieszka Kurant, located at the site where the footbridge linking Warsaw’s smaller and the larger ghetto once stood, forced us to reflect upon the un-said, those silenced and omitted. Moreover, thanks to the efforts of the municipal authorities in Warsaw, we can now see lines on the streets to indicate where the Ghetto enclosures once ran.



*Spring in Warsaw*

Laura Palmer Foundation, Nowy Teatr, Zamek Ujazdowsky, Warsaw, 2009

© Tomasz Paternak



*Spring in Warsaw*

Laura Palmer Foundation, Nowy Teatr, Zamek Ujazdowsky, Warsaw, 2009

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*Spring in Warsaw*

Laura Palmer Foundation, Nowy Teatr, Zamek Ujazdowsky, Warsaw, 2009

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Hence, in response to this catalyst and in reaction to the general atmosphere, I suggested to Public Movement to work on the topic of these genealogical trips organised by the Ministry of Education in Israel. I was somewhat intimidated, knowing that some members of the group had already participated in such trips, but their prompt response was encouraging: "It's time to do it!"

The project: *Spring in Warsaw: a Walk through the Ghetto led by Public Movement* was completed in April 2009, following several months of research on the subject. It came to our attention that the trips were organized for young Israelis during their last school year, just before, in fact, they would undertake military service and with the deliberate objective to strengthen their sense of national identity, enthusiasm and desire to serve to their nation. Due to various security and scheduling issues, most of these young people came to Poland without ever actually visiting the country itself and without coming face to face with their Polish contemporaries. The itinerary and schedule were planned several months in advance. The Israeli pilgrims ended up observing Poland from behind the windows of their tour-buses, and were themselves only seen by Warsaw's inhabitants from behind the windows of their homes. There was no point of contact.

Public Movement set out to familiarise Warsaw with the delegations of Israeli youth and vice versa. In collaboration with the Polish participants, they had a group of city residents pass through the former ghettos, following in the tracks of the Jewish delegations. The groups were to meet at Umschlagplatz, the gathering area from which convoys of Jews were dispatched to the concentration camps. As it transpired, the entire assembly reached the unexpected number of 1,500 persons. Together, they walked along several streets in the locality – Stawki, Miła and Zamenhofa – participating in new public rituals and giving these places a newfound energy – very positive and creative – overflowing with meanings. The happening culminated with a ceremony that took place close to the Monument for the Ghetto Heroes. The leaders of the parade, from both Poland and Israel, wore white uniforms and carried flags

and flowers: emblems of power and yet devoid of those messages that usually characterise state commemorations.

One of the most powerful scenes in Warsaw Springtime was generated by an improvisation of a simple situation that tested the Catholic instincts of the public. The procession arrived at the plaque commemorating the historic genuflection by the German Chancellor Willy Brandt in 1970. At that moment, the artists had the church bells ring and they announced a minute's silence. On hearing the church bells toll – normally, a precipitator of the liturgy for the Eucharist – the majority of participants knelt. The collective genuflection generated a domino effect, but only in front of Brandt plaque and not elsewhere – even though there were about twenty other plaques along the route, some much more befitting for this gesture! The liturgical signal produced an automatic response: kneeling down.

I saw Public Movement for the first time in Israel when they were performing *Also Thus!* Feelings of determination, charisma, coldness and self-confidence, reinforced by their white uniforms, created an ambiguous “ceremony”, recalling a national ritual. It was beguiling in how it toyed with the mechanisms of military mass-spectacle; it was imposing through its cogency; and was attractive in its certainty, coherence and timing. And yet it aroused wariness, fear and scepticism towards the anti-individual apparatuses employed in demonstrating power, symbolic violence and Israeli identitary and historical politics.

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The group of artists toy with the spectators' extreme emotions and avail of the obvious tools to strengthen national identity and the sense of belonging to a group.

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I subsequently saw the same show performed in Łódź. In contrast to the pedestrians, the sleepy observers and their dogs, as well as the security guards dressed in black employed by festival, the young and limber actors marched through the Balucki market. The very same piece performed in Poland transformed Public Movement into an unreal column, consisting of “new” Israelis returning suddenly to Łódź. The city’s everyday setting and this characteristic site from where the Łódź ghetto had burgeoned, were to become the “polygon of action”, a demonstration of force that should defy passive minds and all stereotypes. In the background, one could see police cars. The performative aspect of the event legitimised the presence of the police and security guards. I asked myself, however, whether a performance of classical dance, put on by the same group in the same place, would have required their presence. I think this level of attention to the performance arose probably from the respect owed to the language of power and the media, even if its application was without an official explanation.



Also Thus!

Dialog of four cultures festival, Łódź, 2008

© Krzysztof Bielinski



*Also Thus!*

Dialog of four cultures festival, Łódź, 2008

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*Also Thus!*

Dialog of four cultures festival, Łódź, 2008

© Krzysztof Bielinski

In their performances, Public Movement often reproduce a form of funeral procession inspired by the images conveyed by the Palestinian media. The victim is held aloft by several people, his body is presented to the public, as is done with the martyrs. But just afterwards, all the participants embrace each other and create a circle like in an Israeli folk dance so as to then lean upon each other, breathing regularly, as if they were one body. The group of artists toy with the spectators' extreme emotions: from admiration to fear, passing through their desire to participate, and avail of the obvious tools to strengthen national identity and the sense of belonging to a group, such as a parade, the slow passage of a stylish car and the steps of a patriot dance. The artists apply methods of mass appeal employed by the powers that be. Nonetheless, the individual does not disappear and his or her presence manifests itself, as evidenced by the characteristic appearances of the performers. It reveals to us the boundaries of the self in collective behaviour, laden with muted violence.

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**What is the significance of any symbolic gesture in a power structure?**

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Public Movement mull over the notion of “care of the self” as outlined by Michel Foucault in a book bearing that title—the prescription to take care of oneself, physical practices and the manner in which they are inserted into community life; the imperative for care. In the name of these principles, we should control our body and soul and apply this culture of self-care to achieve happiness, peace and spiritual strength. According to Omer Krieger and Dana Yahalomi of Public Movement, it is impossible to function outside of the system and without certain values.

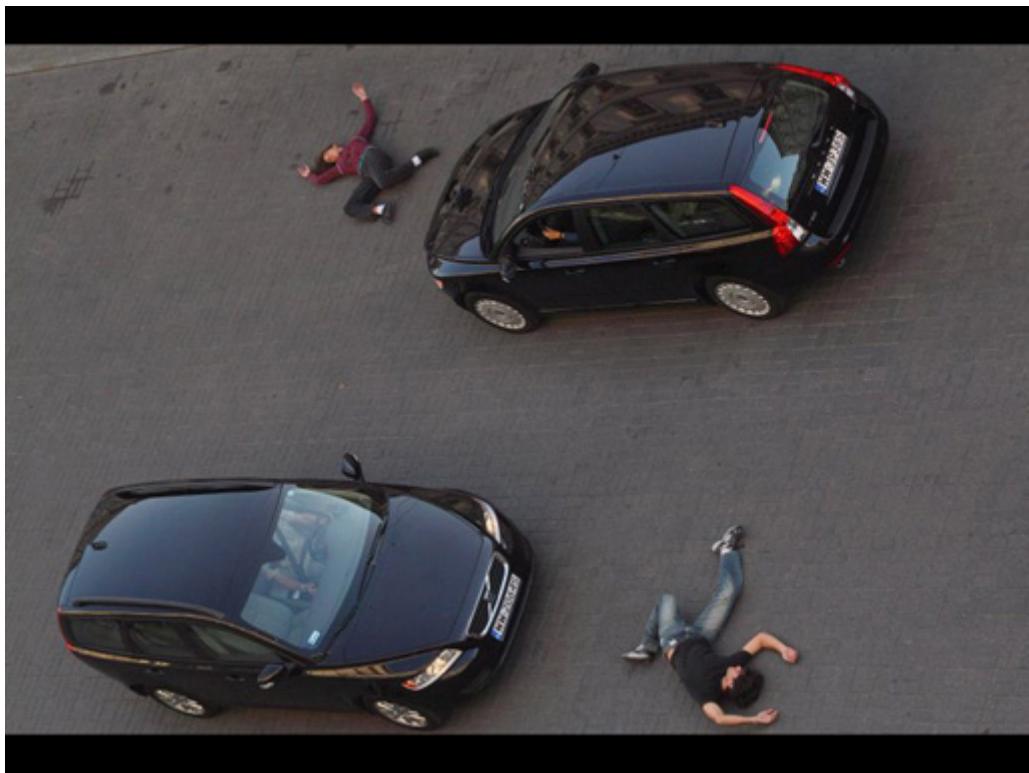
On the Public Movement website [bit.ly/1p24Bxx](http://bit.ly/1p24Bxx) is to be seen the recording of an evacuation of a group of Jewish settlers in the West Bank. A group of worshippers are immersed in prayer in the synagogue and refuse to leave the temple. Only the

intervention of the Israeli police solves the problem. Public Movement watch this historic scene with the cold eye of an anthropologist, journalist and an international observer to the Middle East conflict. What manifestation of power are we observing? Whose interests and ideology are represented by the people crying and by the police in protective uniforms entering the synagogue?

Public Movement performances recreate a comparable situation in order to define the relationship between coldness, balance and the emotions aroused by violence. They strive to understand to what extent self-knowledge enables us to transform. What are the practices and technologies available to us? What influence do they have upon our existence? And finally, how can we differentiate ourselves in a society laden with rituals? What is the significance of any symbolic gesture in a power structure?

In addition to organising illegal parades through the city or gatherings in Tel Aviv's central square, Public Movement has also created performances in which they simulate car crashes. These unexpected happening strike me as even more engaging because they blur, in a deeper and more brutal way, the boundaries between the city's everyday life and a dance event, between reality and spectacle. Hence, the road crash they set up briefly in Łódź, at a place and time nobody expected – which in itself underpins the sheer impact and drama of a natural disaster – reminds us of Allan Kaprow's thoughts regarding the fate of the audience. In his text *Notes on the Elimination of the Audience* dating from 1966, Kaprow sought the possibility of living each day through art, so that the spectator loses awareness of his or her role. The audience's elimination occurs when the public is no longer aware that it is the audience, and despite that fact, it fully reflects on art. This pioneer of happenings noted: "The audience should be entirely got rid of. Each element – human beings, space, matter, time and environment – should integrate. By means of that, any suspicion of theatrical convention will vanish."

On occasion Public Movement have an even greater impact than a happening: the force of a car crash.



*Accident*

Dialog of four cultures festival, Łódź, 2008

© Krzysztof Bielinski



*Accident*

Dialog of four cultures festival, Łódź, 2008

© Krzysztof Bielinski

## BIOGRAPHY

## Joanna Warsza



Joanna Warsza is a curator in the fields of visual and performing arts and architecture. Warsza works mostly in the public realm examining social and political agendas such as, from 2009 to 2010, the legacy of post-Soviet architecture in Caucasus, and with Public Movement in 2009, the phenomenon of the Israeli youth delegations in Poland. From 2006–2008 she explored the invisibility of the Vietnamese community in Warsaw with the project Finissage of Stadium X. Her other curatorial projects include the Manifesta 10 public programme, Saint-Petersbourg, 2014, the Georgian Pavilion, 55th Venice Biennale, Venice, 2013, the Göteborg Biennal, Göteborg, 2013 and, as associate curator, the 7th Berlin Biennale, Berlin, 2012. In 2006, she founded the Laura Palmer Foundation that she ran through 2011. She is editor of books including: *Ministry of Highways: A Guide to the Performative Architecture of Tbilisi* (2013); *Forget Fear* (2012); and *Stadium X-A Place That Never Was* (2009). Warsza lives and works in Berlin and Warsaw.

Photo : © M. Gornicka.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

## 181<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the Independence of Belgium

Public Movement

"Public Movement studies and creates public choreographies. What is the 'public' and which choreographies does it perform? When we look at folk dances, demonstrations or street fights, we can notice they all have repetitive choreographic elements. Who invented those movements? Who is the choreographer?"

On the basis of this proposition by Public Movement, several artists have met Dana Yahalomi and Omer Krieger in order to explore the different possibilities of moving as a group in public space, experimenting with notions such as conflict, the political body and the embodiment of politics. They analysed and observed the political geography of Brussels and looked at physical manifestations of politics and the political in the specific time and place they were at.

From their observations, reflections and exchanges, they chose to celebrate the 181<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the independence of Belgium. To do so, they identified places of Brussels which are linked to the Belgian Revolution of 1830: Grand-Place, Grand and Petit Sablon, Mont des Arts, Rue de la Madeleine, Central Station, Rue Royale and Place de la Monnaie. Five performers dressed in the colours of Belgium walked and linked these places marching at the sound of *The Mute Girl* of Portici, as the riot which led to the Belgian Revolution broke right after the performance of this opera at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in August 1830.

At each place, they reenacted the same choreographed ceremony to end up displaying the (fictional) invitation to the official ceremony celebrating the 181<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the

independence of Belgium. One by one, the performers read an extract of the text of *The Mute Girl of Portici*:

*Better to die than to remain wretched!*  
*For a slave what danger is there?*  
*Throw off the yoke, which weighs us down*  
*And under our blows the foreigner will perish!*  
*Sacred love of the fatherland,*  
*Bring us boldness and pride;*  
*To my nation I owe my life;*  
*It owes to me its liberty.*

# 181<sup>ème</sup> ANNIVERSAIRE DE L'INDEPENDANCE DE LA BELGIQUE

Le public est invité à la Cérémonie Officielle le

**25/08/2011**

au Théâtre Royal de La Monnaie

**20H00**

l'Opéra “La Muette de Portici”

sera joué en cette occasion

entrée libre



.be

181<sup>st</sup> birthday of the Independence of Belgium  
Public Movement avec Patricia Barakat, Julie Gilbert, Olivia Lallement, Elsa Martinez and Mathilde Mazabrad

Cifas, Brussels, 2011

© Colin Delfosse



*181<sup>st</sup> birthday of the Independence of Belgium*

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Cifas, Brussels, 2011

© Colin Delfosse

ROUTE

## Of Fame and Anonymity

Voina

*The following texts are constituted for the most part from extracts of a conference given by Voina under the title of Voina and Political Art in Russia on September 6, 2013 at La Bellone in Brussels within the framework of the Summer University at Cifas. The article's final paragraphs were sent by Voina in April 2014 in response to a series of written questions and formed the basis for a text that ultimately remains incomplete due to the fact that Voina's survival conditions, notably their access to electricity, were unexpectedly aggravated. Having no news from them since May 2014, we learned in July 2014 the beating up and arrest of Oleg Vorotnikov, one of Voina founding members, in Venice. He was under threat of extradition to Russia. The editors pinned on the title of the article.*

Artists are extremely sensitive beings, at times withdrawn and even perhaps of little use. It is sometimes difficult to believe that artists can change anything but Voina has effectively succeeded in transforming the political situation and the formation of civil society in Russia.

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**What we are doing now is no longer based on pranks or humour; rather we could call it anonymous art.**

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Our young civil society in Russia is by now well acquainted with our various street happenings and actions, which have likewise come to the attention of people throughout the world. Nowadays we are doing something else. What we are doing now is no longer based on pranks or humour; rather we could call it anonymous art. And the reasons for our change of course are manifold.

First and foremost from the outset we prefer anonymous art and art that avoids the use of money. And insofar as we anonymous activists are concerned, it is all about ideology. While previously, whenever our actions were publicised people would witness them; we gradually realised that we were becoming hostages of our own actions, not in the sense of being political hostages but rather hostages of show business. What's more, we had garnered attention in the mass media; the more time we spent on the TV, the more we turned into a brand name. If we were to have to continue in that vein, we would have become another Rolling Stones traveling the globe for the forthcoming half-a-century, making a show of ourselves.

So, at the height of our popularity, when we got of jail, we decided to change tack and go underground, enabling us, as it were, to avoid the police radars and those other radars we might have encountered on our way forward.

Moreover, we were, or at least some of us, disillusioned and disappointed by the pacifist actions. Our mode of action had become so popular that it served as a template for all sorts of activists; a great number of actions had been accomplished but the objective of these actions was the action itself, and not the result that could have been obtained. Perhaps movements such as *Los Indignados* and Occupy have an integral *raison d'être* in Europe or in the United States? In Russia we have a completely similar phenomenon, but its appearance is truly disgusting and intolerable. It doesn't follow any objective; it lacks any purpose. It is more concerned with trends, with fashion, like the "Emo" movement or Heavy Metal...

The third reason for which our actions are nowadays anonymous is that if we were to continue working openly we would be arrested and imprisoned by the police. The Russian authorities, as elsewhere in the world, are hypersensitive and don't want anyone else getting their hands on their power. During our arrest they made it known to us that they had plans to eliminate us physically, but seeing that

we were arrested in front of cameras, they were unable to accomplish this. The reasons for our change of tack were philosophically grounded but necessity also led us to change our tactics.

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Our group's objective was: a new language.

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There has always been a tradition of opposition movements in Russia. Back then we were still young students and we realised that we were lacking a language with which we could speak with people. That the opposition's actions were fruitless was due to the fact that it was using the same old methods as those in power. While there was contact between the various opposition movements, it resembled more a dialogue between corpses in a graveyard. We thus set out to create to a new language that could inspire the masses. And while it might strike one as being a bit too earnest to state this, before our arrival on the scene, the opposition in Russia occupied a very marginal role. While the public fumed and something was afoot, the terms "right" and "left" were no longer of any significance. So, our group's objective was: a new language.

And yet we understood that we needed to remain completely autonomous. We were perhaps amongst the first in Russia to rail against the institutionalisation of art. Sooner or later young talented artists found themselves in the grips of those in power and the moneyed class, and were to become like well-trained animals, just longing to find themselves a gallery, money and a grant... and this in the end was the death of the independent message.

We realised at a later stage that even the system of opposition operated in identical ways and ultimately took over. We didn't stay in prison for a lengthy period but long enough for the most liberal opposition group to commandeer our message. On being released from jail, we had become hostages to a

discourse about opposition; a case, as it were, of plenty of good-sounding talk but little ensuing action. Finally, we had to retrace an identical path: not to shake hands with the galleryists; not to become members of the arts establishment.

At one point we devised our strategy for dealing with the mass media. As you probably have noticed, the titles of our pieces often contain extremely crude language. *Censorship sucks!* In the action we performed [the day before the election of the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in 2009], we gave it the title *Fuck for the Heir Puppy Bear*. The term for “fuck” is much coarser in Russian. The surname of our president Léonid the madcap could also be translated as “asshole” or “dickhead”. *Dick Captured by the FSB* was the title of our action at the Liteyny Drawbridge in Saint Petersburg. At the punk concert we organised in the courtroom we even billed ourselves so as to be literally called *Dick in the Ass*. Our strategy was thus to turn into something dirty, and as such unacceptable for the press and the mass media. We thus provided them with all-the-more reason not to speak about us seeing that they couldn’t employ such a crude vocabulary.

Ultimately, our behaviour is deliberately outrageous whenever people come across us. We never salute the well-known artists. At times we even shoplift. We don’t use money. There is nothing attractive about us. But, unfortunately, this swath of measures wasn’t sufficient. Despite our tactics, people continued to talk about and to praise us... On leaving jail we got to know the Michael Jackson complex, whereby we were recognised and greeted everywhere, in the metro, in shops, whereas we went to the shops to shoplift [...] Consequently, we ceased to sign our actions using the name of Voina, for as soon as we did such, they were plagiarised and copied. This served as an opportunity for other groups to use our name, for we had gone underground. By sacrificing our glory we were able to avoid being institutionalised. Nowadays, at least, we are able to travel abroad without being recognised.

One needs to take into account that whenever one person-  
alises Voina, what is generally meant refers exclusively to

four “prominent” individuals. The remaining 200 or so have remained in hiding while the four above-mentioned represent merely the tip of the iceberg. It is thus thanks to our chosen approach since our foundation – a foundation that has been obscured by myths and false information that circulated about us – that we have been able to survive. We were thus able to read during a court case against us the following conclusions, collected, or so we presume, from various press sources. According to this serious document, the Voina group had 3000 adherents spread throughout the most important cities in the Russian Federation, liaising with cells in exotic countries such as Greece or South Africa, places we have never even set foot in.

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Our lives continue outside of contemporary art,  
which we have abandoned and left behind us.

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In the end, the question of whether we consider what we do as art or not, or whether we ourselves as artists or not, has become meaningless for us. We hear it frequently, and naturally the question is in itself exemplary and of critical import, but the search for the answer has become even more tedious and monotonous, for we are constantly obliged to trample yet again over trodden ground; it's no longer exciting and that is why we have decided to no longer go there. Our lives continue outside of contemporary art, which we have abandoned and left behind us.

For a long time we attempted to break down the frontiers between art and activism and at that stage we were advising those who were following in our footsteps to do likewise until finally we had fuck all more to do with contemporary art.

At present we consider that contemporary art isn't interesting enough to mix with something else, expecting, as it were, to create an interesting cocktail. The problem, on the one hand, is that as a method contemporary art is too accessible, even

for those outside of the artistic sphere, such as state officials and so on, and thus to its enemies – one can become a master in a matter of seconds, and that is a cul-de-sac. And yet, contemporary art is so stuffed up to the gills with diverse and depressing shit, superficiality, with commercial puke, or conversely with experimentation without purpose, whereby the objective of the experience is instantly forgotten, as though it were something that nobody really had any use for. It is so loaded that we constantly feel ourselves condemned to being confined to the garbage bins in the backyard of a McDonald's outlet.

There was indeed a time when such a proximity with garbage inspired generations of artists. Now we can say: once upon a time. In that sense, activists would do well not to associate themselves with contemporary art. Another factor is that it is a rarity to find anybody artistically gifted amongst the activists. In that milieu, artistic talent is rare.

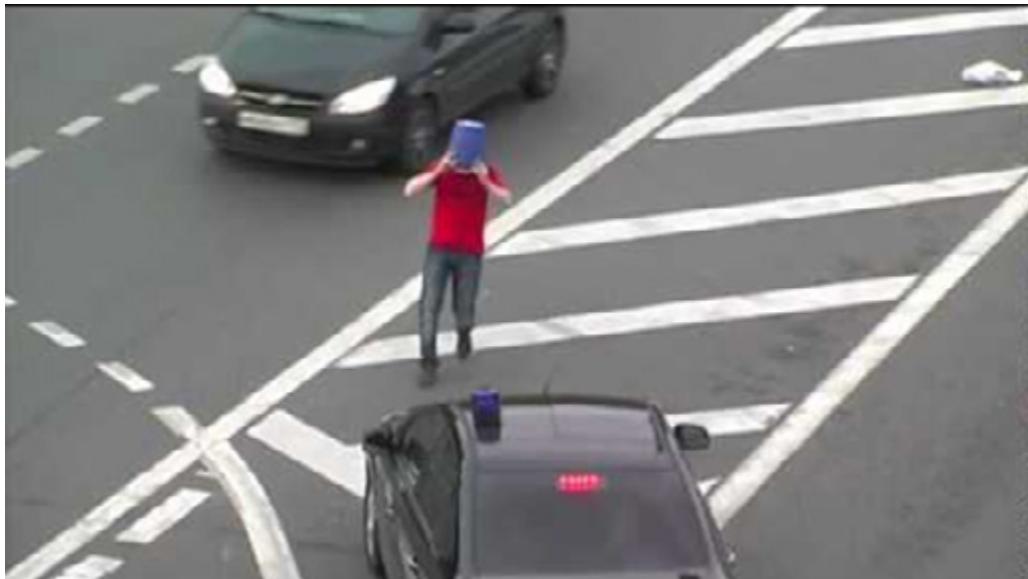
[bit.ly/1zQ3Z43](http://bit.ly/1zQ3Z43)

*Car Accident under the walls of Kremlin  
Voina*

Moscou, 2010

Leo the Fucknut climbs on the car of an “official” which has a blue revolving light, before running away like a Sunday road hog. This action is part of the Blue Bucket Movement, denouncing official reckless driving.

© Voina



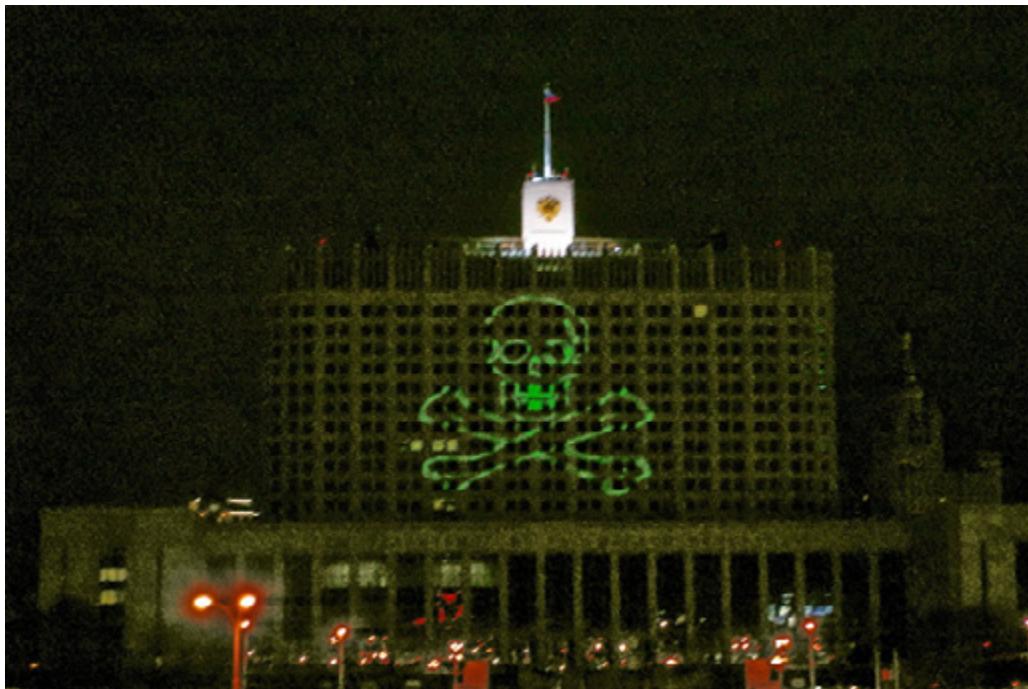
Watch the video here: [bit.ly/1NNwYdr](http://bit.ly/1NNwYdr)

*Storming of the White House*  
Voina

Moscou, 2008

Members of Voina project a skull on the front of the official residence of Prime Minister Poutine, while others climb up the fences of the building, get inside and break the security cameras.

© Voina



Watch the video here: [bit.ly/1nQ47wB](http://bit.ly/1nQ47wB)

A Dick Held Prisoner at the FSB  
Voina

Saint-Petersbourg, 2010

Members of Voina draw a giant graffiti of 65 meters high for 27 meters wide in 23 seconds, on the roadway of a bascule bridge situated right across the headquarters of FSB, heir of KGB.

© Voina



Watch the video here: [bit.ly/1rMnM2i](http://bit.ly/1rMnM2i)

*Nobody gives a fuck about Pestel  
Voina*

Moscou, 2008

At the light bulbs department of an Auchan supermarket in Moscow, Voina organises, in memory of the Decembrists revolutionaries hung in 1826, the hanging of illegal migrant and homosexual workers, among which there is a jew.

© Voina



Watch the video here: [bit.ly/1o8vPPu](http://bit.ly/1o8vPPu)

## BIOGRAPHY

## Voina

Voina is a street collective of actionist artists who engage in political protest art. Political orientation: anarchist. Enemies: philistines, cops, the regime. Organization type: militant gang, dominated by horizontal ties in everyday life and employing vertical relationships during actions. The group preaches renunciation of money and disregard towards the law ("the no-whoring way"). Founded by Vor and Kozlenok in October 2005, the group was named after Vor ("War"). Initially, Voina actions were clandestine and anonymous, and were called "training" or "practice". Voina has enjoyed public recognition since 2008. To date, over two hundred activists have participated in Voina actions. At least twenty criminal investigations into the group's activities have been initiated, some of them still ongoing. According to Russia's Investigations Committee, "Art group VOINA" is a left-wing radical anarchist collective whose central goal is to carry out PR actions directed against the authorities, and specifically against law enforcement officials with the aim of discrediting them in the eyes of the public. Branches of VOINA exist in all major Russian cities. The group's sympathizers number approximately three thousands. VOINA members maintain contacts with anarchist groups and individuals from all around the world holding left-wing radical views on art and on the world order (Italy, Slovakia, France, USA, South Africa, Greece)".

[bit.ly/1lbmXlv](http://bit.ly/1lbmXlv)

STROLL

## Coq/Cock

Steven Cohen

At Trocadéro, Paris, on Tuesday 10 September, 2013, I made art and the French national police made a scandal.

The artwork was made specifically as part of, and for, my contribution to the exhibition “My Johannesburg” at La Maison Rouge Foundation Antoine de Galbert... but the work *Coq/Cock* was made to exist in its own right outside of a singular and specific aim.

The performance was an uninvited contribution to the Season South Africa in France. Because I am a South African artist resident and working in France for ten years now, I made a work about dual national identities, about being pulled in different directions. It was for that I used a symbol of my identity (my bandaged genitals) and a symbol of French nationalism, Frank – the coq Gallus Gallus.

The performance lasted ten to fifteen minutes. I did not stop when told to (performance art is about following internal instruction, not external ones) but I did not resist when the French national police forced me to stop.

Whatever I did, I did in the name and spirit of art in a country which is known throughout the world for art.

For me, art should move out of the quarantined area of being restricted to an art public only and be accessible to the general public, which is why I organise some of my work as ‘happenings’ in public space without invitation

Artistic meaning and relevance are as individual as are concepts of beauty. But I refuse to accept the definition of the work as “sexual exhibitionism” as charged.

What is called public space often has real or supposed custodians, people who like to feel responsible for things and claim space as theirs to protect. I had no doubt there would be the involvement of certain people who had a proprietary air and who would claim to have control over the territory, and in real terms, also assert control over my body.

But I was totally surprised by the involvement of the police, who I supposed, had better things to do, Paris being not entirely crime free.

France is in a state of what they call “vigipirate”. The levels of urgency vary and are defined by colour, there is an orange level, a red level etc. So if you're black or lavender or off-colour in any sense politically or culturally or socially, you don't have the right to think, speak, act, express yourself.

For me, the words French and moral do not sit comfortably in the same sentence. This is the country that assisted the Nazis in every way they could and took fifty years to admit any culpability at all. Today most French claim that their family were “résistants”. So where did they millions of anonymous letters of denunciation of Jews in hiding come from? Many Jews who were deported from France only saw their first Nazis when they arrived at the concentration or extermination camps. It was largely the French authorities who carried out the raids and arrests of their own citizens in their own country. But it took half a century to get them to even admit it.

The written statement of the verdict is hypocrisy at its most elegant, a bouquet of flowery words that smells worse than a skunk. By giving this strange verdict, the State wants it seen that I am a sexual pervert and sociopath, but the State of France is liberal and generous and can accept deviance. The verdict for me is like trying on haute couture made for someone else, it doesn't fit me. Whatever it is that I did, it

isn't sexual exhibitionism – there is no sexual element to it. There might be a better and more appropriate charge. Degenerate Art maybe, sounds familiar?

No one from the public complained, not even the brides of Jesus who had gathered there for Eiffel Tower worship. That was my real crime, distracting attention from the most visited (paid for) monument in the world for a minute or two. The State charged me, not the public.

I'm now working on finding an artistic way to pay off my astonishingly huge (for an artist) legal fees. This was a very expensive work to have made as a contribution to French culture.

I also have to spend some time looking for my self-respect, balance and sense of humour – which I seem to have misplaced, left lying around somewhere... maybe at the police station where they interrogated and humiliated and examined and measured and evaluated me, physically and psychologically.

I am sorry that I let the police force me to give them my DNA, I'd like that back.

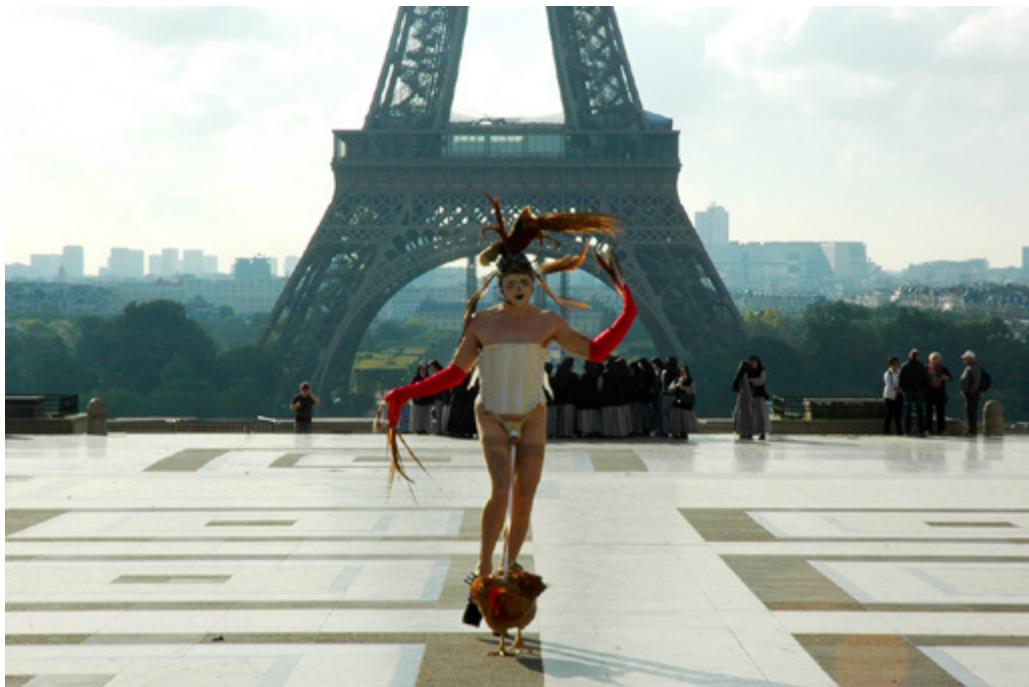
Of all the things I've had up my arse in the name of art, a butt plug, strange enemas, an animal tail, a dildo camera, etc., nothing has been as uncomfortable as having had a government up my arse.



*Coq/Cock*  
Steven Cohen

Trocadéro, Paris, 2013

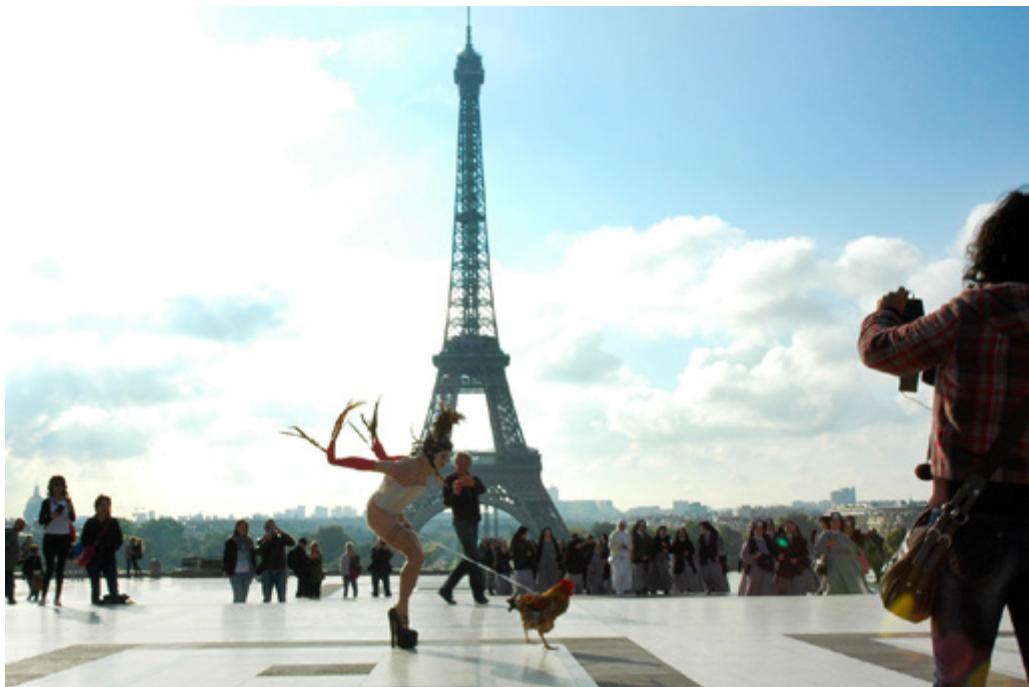
© Quentin Evrard



*Coq/Cock*  
Steven Cohen

Trocadéro, Paris, 2013

© Quentin Evrard



*Coq/Cock*  
Steven Cohen

Trocadéro, Paris, 2013

© Quentin Evrard



Coq/Cock  
Steven Cohen

Trocadéro, Paris, 2013

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*Coq/Cock*  
Steven Cohen

Trocadéro, Paris, 2013

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*Coq/Cock*  
Steven Cohen

Trocadéro, Paris, 2013

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*Coq/Cock*  
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Trocadéro, Paris, 2013

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*Coq/Cock*  
Steven Cohen

Trocadéro, Paris, 2013

© Quentin Evrard

## BIOGRAPHY

## Steven Cohen



Steven Cohen was born in 1962 in South Africa and lives in Lille, France. He is a performance artist who stages interventions in the public realm and in gallery/theatre spaces. His work invariably draws attention to that which is marginalised in society, starting with his own identity as a gay, Jewish, white South African man. Cohen has performed at the Festival d'Automne in Paris in 2008, 2009, and 2011. Performances have also taken place at the Munich Opera Festival, Bavarian State Opera; the first Aichi Triennale, Japan; Festival Escena Contemporánea, Madrid; Danae festival, Milan; La Bâtie - the Festival of Geneva; C/U (Body Mind) Festival, Warsaw; Festival Trouble, Les Halles de Schaerbeek, Brussels; Festival les Anticodes, Brest, France; Oktoberdans festival, Bergen, Norway; Festival d'Avignon, France; and the National Arts Festival, Grahamstown, South Africa, among others. Recent group exhibitions at the Museum for Contemporary Art, Roskilde, Denmark (2014); la Maison Rouge, Paris (2013); the 11th Havana Biennale (2012); Beirut Art Centre, Lebanon (2012); the Vienna Kunsthalle (2011); Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki (2011); the South African National Gallery, Cape Town (2009-10).

Photo : © Marianne Greber.

NEIGHBOURHOOD

**MANIFESTEMENT****Three dimensions once a year**

Laurent d'Ursel

Since 2006 the Brussels based Collective MANIFESTEMENT have developed and organised an annual event on a theme in three dimensions, of which the third is political by definition. Thematically, it professes to be refreshing, improbable and disturbing. All at once it scratches, stings, bites, enrages and tickles. In a world becoming blander by the day, it doesn't content itself with merely hitting it off: it has got to hurt. In a world becoming increasingly reticulated, uniform and jarring, it has got to provoke a neuronal short-circuit by means of a "rupture" that "aggravates" reality; it's less a case of resisting than interrupting the sequence of mental links all the more powerful due to their invisibility as such—links that re-tie, links that re-enslave.

Even if provocative, the theme cannot arouse just pleasure, even an intellectual one. It is deliciously fierce, wickedly unexpected and intelligently correct. And, certainly not humorous, convivial or therapeutic. There's nothing of a farce, or a gag or a party-piece about it. The theme's pertinence derives from an impertinence that is never gratuitous, formulaic or facile; it is invariably deliberate, grating, ruthless, caustic—in sum, on par with the despair or anger which fuelled it.

**The Collective doesn't exert itself for a *majority*, but rather for a *maximum* number of people.**

The events cannot evoke dreams without reflection, reflection without laughter, and laughter without a pinch. It hits the road, taking on the risks inherently involved. And others risks. Of being poorly understood, or even being beyond comprehension. In particular, a theme that would win unanimous support in every milieu and the wide world over would instantly implode. The Collective doesn't exert itself for a *majority*, but rather for a *maximum* number of people. In terms of nuance and precision, it is at once proportionate and significant. And likewise, the fact that a theme might ring favourably to the enemies' impartial ears is not sufficient cause to reject it. Quite the opposite.

Insolence is part and parcel of the Collective, which prides itself on possessing a keenness that keeps it ahead of the zeitgeist, in such a way that their events catch everyone off-guard. From that point they invariably adopt the guise of an answer to a question that hasn't even been posed... but whose arrival is nonetheless well timed.

A most persistent form of tedium might mark even the proceedings themselves, inasmuch as it is vital that the first passer-by who happens to comes along could spontaneously join in without that his/ her presence being swallowed up in a choreography or a dramatization devised by the organisers in advance.



*There are too many artists!*  
MANIFESTEMENT

Brussels, 2006

© Jacques Dujardin



*For the incorporation of Belgium into Congo!*  
MANIFESTEMENT

Brussels, 2006

© Jean-Frédéric Hanssens



No! "Islamism" isn't the only Word that has taken a Dip: there are Plenty of Others!  
MANIFESTEMENT

Brussels, 2008

© Jean-Frédéric Hanssens



*Sick and tired of death!*  
MANIFESTEMENT

Brussels, 2009

© Christine Bluard



*The homeless take to the street to... be heard!*  
MANIFESTEMENT

Brussels, 2010

© Hélène Taquet

A genuine sense of joy, however, marks the event's philosophical culmination. Yet, it never degenerates into a debilitating manifestation of joy for that matter. Those participating are neither puppets, nor out-and-out eccentrics, nor joyous revellers but rather conceptual agitators, wary of the obvious, consensus-breakers – in sum, genuinely rude.

Everyone is free to interpret (or not) the event as a vibrant artistic performance, characterised as “contemporary art”, and to document his or her participation in their curriculum vitae of artistic exploits. Particularly given that the Collective invites everybody to unleash their creativity in every possible direction within the designated limits of the chosen theme. Yet to consider the event as a *hyperrealist* inspired oeuvre on the basis that it “it would be hard to tell it apart from a *real demo*” constitutes an argument to be excluded from the Collective. It does not *revisit* the form of a “demonstration”; rather, it *usurps* it.

The Collective is anything but democratic: the “number of votes” that everyone disposes of is proportional to their level of enthusiasm and their devotion to the cause championed by the event. It is an *enthusmocracy*.

Is this clear? Not too sure. Past and future themes speak louder than these laborious theoretical considerations.

A three-pronged methodological principle underpins the Collective's events: *For Weeds and against the Bad Seeds!* (2029), *An End to Differences! Long Live Sameness!* (2025) and *For a Sharing of Violence!* (2014). And three axes define its political programme: *Let's Deprogram the Satisfaction of Stupidity!* (2034) *Ever Higher, Bigger and more Beautiful! [on the Occasion of the 490<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Word “Dumbing-down”]* (2008) and *Il-legalize Joy's Organised Idleness!* (2019) a program based upon a pragmatism in the best of taste: *For the Outright Pejoration of the Adjective “Human”!* (2022), *Imprison Anybody who Believes in a Solution! De-demonize the Cynics! Let's Dump of the Idea of Paradise!* (2024) and *So as to Be Done with the Planet... on a High Note!* (2033).

With the exception of joining a religion to go against the current does not constitute an end in itself.

This penchant for grand societal debates wrapped up in as many arguable causes doesn't prevent the Collective making its discordant voice heard even in the political arena of the ever-burning issues of the day. *Fatwa against Fundamentalist Integration!* (2015), *Don't Trust Neoliberals with Neoliberalism!* (2035), *Rally against the Discrimination of blond left-handed, blue-eyed People born on an even-numbered Day in a leap Year!* (2026), even *For the Merging of the Concepts of Marxism and Narcissism!* (2031). Furthermore, the performance's efficiency could require it to specify its target group amongst the populace, as for example: *Women get on our Nerves!* (2016) *Death to the Young, still Young and ever Young!* (2027) *Parents go without Dessert! [Demo – Adults not allowed in]* (2030), *Let's tax Rents, Lynch the Entitled and Ransack Artist's Residencies!* (2017) or again *Down with the Descendants of Future Belgians who drove the Dutch out in 1830!* (2036). Those groups focused on their social identity are not spared: *No! "Islamism" isn't the only Word that has taken a Dip: there are Plenty of Others!* (2008) *Goy, straighten up! [We, too, we're everywhere]* (2012), *For a reversible, elastic, revolving, permeable, random and optional Aristocracy!* (2037) and even *The Homeless take to the Streets to... be heard!* (2009-2011). Due to a lack of sufficiently powerful local networks, the Collective MANIFESTEMENT on a rare occasion engages with an international issue: *For the Re-attachment of Belgium to the Congo!* (2007) and *Help the Chinese to invade us [The Future is an Act of Faith]* (2023).



All United against Democracy!  
MANIFESTEMENT

Brussels, 2011

© Nicolas Sniecinski



*Goy, straighten up! [We, too, we're everywhere]*  
MANIFESTEMENT

Brussels, 2012

© Anne Löwenthal



*Sans titre - Zonder titel - Untitled*  
MANIFESTEMENT

Brussels, 2013

© Jean-Frédéric Hanssens



For a Sharing of Violence!  
MANIFESTEMENT

Brussels, 2014

© Anne Löwenthal

With the exception of joining a religion – even though denouncing all sorts of “religions” is part of the Collective’s DNA – to go against the current does not constitute an end in itself. But this misunderstanding persists and is undoubtedly inevitable once our contemplating the world liberates itself from any qualms. From which emerged: *United against Democracy!* (2011) *Love is Blackmail, a Trap, a Threat, a Superstition, a Drug and an Excuse!* (2021) *Against the Injunction of Memory and Memory Injecting!* (2020) *Declare January 21 as “World Day for Sexual Abstinence”!* (2018) and even *Stop elementary Anti-Clericalism! [the Church also knows how to dig its Grave]* (2032).

The pessimism permeating the Collective MANIFESTEMENT is much too joyful to yield to the sirens of defeatism. Quite the opposite: *Sick and tired of Death!* (2009) *Against the general and restricted Relativity of Everything!* (2038) and *Roll on the Canonisation of Pablo Picasso, the Ennoblement of Bill Gates and the Freeze-drying of Mao-Tse Tung!* (2023).

There is but a single misfortune: *Against the Fate that has not ridded us of Laurent Ursel before 2040!* (2040) for it was clear from the outset that *There are too many Artists!* (2006) The sequel has not been written: *Sans titre – Zonder titel – Untitled* (2013).

Translation (French to English): John Barrett

bit.ly/WmudfC

## BIOGRAPHY

## Laurent d'Ursel



Multiform artist out of competition, Laurent d'Ursel produces everything passing through his central nervous system. He sets the limits that he can overcome through the lock of words, replaces genius by enthusiasm and the time remaining by the things he will have done. Proof by 4 examples: [bit.ly/1piy7xO](http://bit.ly/1piy7xO) [bit.ly/WmudfC](http://bit.ly/WmudfC) [bit.ly/1tZILBq](http://bit.ly/1tZILBq) and [bit.ly/1tdpyqS](http://bit.ly/1tdpyqS). He bends under projects but never breaks, though, he actually did once or three times (under medication since then). Was homeless in another life and proves it here: [bit.ly/1rmjTkn](http://bit.ly/1rmjTkn). His latest motto: "Total confidence, zero talent!" (Laughs). He pulls out his gun when he hears these three words: Belgian, surrealist, provocative.

Photo : © Benjamin Briolet.

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